

**Status of the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (original) A dock leveler for a loading dock, comprising:

a deck adapted to be coupled to the loading dock such that the deck is movable relative thereto; wherein the deck comprises a right upper plate, a left upper plate, and a plurality of lower support beams; wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate are affixed to the lower support beams; the deck has a front edge, a rear edge, and two lateral edges; the deck has a deck width that extends between the two lateral edges; the deck has a deck length that extends from the front edge to the rear edge; the deck has a joint between the right upper plate and the left upper plate; the joint extends longitudinally from the front edge to the rear edge of the deck; and the right upper plate and the left upper plate are substantially stationary relative to each other; and

a lip extension plate coupled to the front edge and being movable relative thereto.

2. (original) The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint includes a connecting bar disposed below the right upper plate and the left upper plate.

3. (original) The dock leveler of claim 2, wherein the connecting bar has a bar length, a bar width, and a bar thickness all of which are perpendicular to each other, wherein the bar length runs along the joint, the bar thickness extends from the right upper plate to the left upper plate, and the bar width is greater than the bar thickness.

4. (original) The dock leveler of claim 3, wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate provide an upper driving surface, wherein the connecting bar is disposed no higher than the upper driving surface.

5. (original) The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the right upper plate and the left upper plate provide an upper driving surface, and the joint includes a plurality of spaced-apart weld beads that are disposed below the upper driving surface.

6. (original) The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint provides a gap between the right upper plate and the left upper plate.

7. (original) The dock leveler of claim 6, wherein the gap has a variable gap width that is visible.

8. (original) The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein a first frictional pattern exists on top of the right upper plate and second frictional pattern exists on top of the left upper plate, wherein the first frictional pattern is shifted out of registry with the second frictional pattern.

9. (original) The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint is substantially parallel to the plurality of lower support beams.

10. (original) The dock leveler of claim 1, wherein the joint is substantially centrally located between the two lateral edges of the deck.